DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 121 044 EC 082 767

AUTHOR Padzensky, Herb
TITLE Inservice Training -- Workmeetings, Task Forces -- Etc.: How to Plan for a Successful Group Session. Training Monograph One.
INSTITUTION Colorado State Dept. of Institutions, Denver. Div. of Developmental Disabilities.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 29p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *General Education; Group Dynamics; *Handicapped Children; Inservice Courses; *Inservice Education; Institutes (Training Programs); *Planning Meetings; Professional Training; Program Planning; Staff Improvement; *Staff Meetings; Workshops

ABSTRACT

The processes involved in staging successful inservice training, staff meetings, and task force sessions are described. Examples are provided and details are given for four phases of preparation: preplanning (including identification of need, setting priority objectives, and determining the type of group session); planning (covering such aspects as participant involvement, agenda content, and suggested schedules); completing details prior to the meeting (such as selecting the leader); and carrying out the session itself. A chart of group interaction levels is provided. (CL)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED121044

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

INSERVICE TRAINING - WORKMEETINGS

TASK FORCES - ETC.

How to Plan for a Successful Group Session

Herb Padzensky

1976

Training Monograph One from the

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND

TRAINING OFFICE

Colorado
Department of Institutions
Division for Developmental Disabilities

Herb Padzensky, Ph.D., Director
Staff Development and Training
Division for Developmental Disabilities

Raymond Leidig, M.D.
Executive Director
Colorado Department of Institutions

George Jones
Director
Division for Developmental Disabilities

EC082767

INTRODUCTION

Most of us at one time or another have been asked to plan a meeting. Sometimes we are successful, but, more often, we feel a little frustrated with the outcome.

Carrying out a successful group session of any size is not a chance happening. Good planning is a logical procedure beginning with deciding whether it is necessary to even have a session for arriving at desired outcomes.

The science of planning a group session involves organizing your thinking and including natural group processes. This monograph explores several problems and offers constructive suggestions to anyone involved in putting on inservice training, holding a workmeeting or staff meeting, or organizing a task force.

In order to help you understand the principles presented on the following pages, a concrete example is presented and developed through the several phases of effecting a sussessful group session.

Please do not be impressed with your current ability to plan and carry out group sessions. This can be disastrous to making you an even better planner and provider of excellent group sessions.

THERE ARE NO ASSUMPTIONS TOO OBVIOUS TO OMIT

So, now lets begin,..

What is a Group Session?

A group session is any interpersonal interaction between two or more people for a purpose of developing or transmitting information .

There are really only three different types of group sessions:

Inservice Training

Workmeeting and Staff Meeting

Task Force

Inservice Training

The purpose of inservice training is to impart some knowledge to a group. The group leader is responsible for the expertise. Group participants expect to learn a new skill, technique, or information.

Inservice training information can be imparted in a formal or informal manner. The most formal manner is a lecture style. An informal manner can be a discussion closely directed by the leader where participants may already have enough basic expertise but are unaware of it or need to have their knowlege restructured in a more meaningful way. Everywhere between the formal - informal continuum can be added learning materials, audio-visual aides, and problem solving simulations.

Workmeeting and Staff Meeting

The purpose of a workmeeting or staff meeting is to use expertise from participants to solve a problem. Responsibility of the group leader is to keep the group on track and draw conclusions from the discussion.

Staff meetings are included here because it is common for an agency head to have meetings with key staff in order to fulfill certain agency needs. The leader presents problems or asks for problems from the group to be discussed and strategies devised.

Staff meetings are not always worksession oriented and may have some traces of inservice training and task force on its agenda, but, properly inserted, provide a basis for group expertise to review and suggest added information or method.

Task Force

The purpose of a task force is to explore the scope of a problem. It should be a special group with a single mission and limited by time to disband after the problem is reviewed and researched.

The group is usually composed of several individuals whose expertise is sufficient to study the task problem fully. Responsibility of the leader is to facilitate group's activity and coordinate the different dimensions of task force activity.

Other Types of Group Sessions are Not Different

There are many terms used to identify group sessions such as committees, symposiums, discussions, etc. One may even consider a social hour as a group session. In review of the definition, if during the social individuals discuss issues, learn of each other, or make decisions, the social can be considered as a group session.

FOUR PHASES OF
SUCCESSFUL GROUP SESSIONS

There are four phases necessary in carrying out a successful group session:

Preplanning

Planning

Detail

Session

There are no specific time frames for any of these. Depending on the clarity of need and scope of problems, any phase can take from a few minutes to several days or weeks. If you attempt to skip too lightly over one phase, there can be problems. Remember, a weak link at any part of the process only means extra work at another phase. The ultimate people to save your skin are the group's session leader and participants.

To help you understand principles presented, an example is provided. You are given an initial problem and can follow it through to the sessions phase.

The Preplanning Phase

The prurpose of preplanning is to determine whether or not it is profitable to have a group session of some sort. Too many times a group session is decided too quickly only to find out later, it is not necessary. In the preplanning phase there is no committment to having a session, and should you find it either unnecessary or inconvenient, there is no need to make any embarrassing cancellations.

Ok, we start with a feeling there is a problem to be solved. At this point it is not clear whether to have a training program, a worksession, or a task force. If the problem is too vague, a task force (committee) may be formed to learn its scope and depth.

How the Need is Identified

Sometimes the need is developed through conversation, from a needs assessment survey, or as an outcome of a previous group session (a task force). Consistently it is generally stated and with relatively little indepth thinking.

There are several ways a problem is presented to you. Following are several actual requests made to this author:

> "How about helping us plan a two-day workshop on ..."
>
> "...and with this change we need a training session to..."
>
> "Its time to have our annual symposium and..."
>
> "A good question, we can organize a task force to..."

By examining the above statements, it is obvious considerable discussion has to take place whether to have a group session, what it should cover, who and how many participants to invite, the type of group session to have, just to mention planning concerns.

However, sometimes the issues are a little more clear-cut. The next set of examples are easier to manage but almost as general as the previous list:

1. Develop improved communication systems between agencies.
2. Teach a group to do their job more effectively.
3. Understand new procedures to be used.
4. Improve client welfare.

One can agree the problems stated are representative of those commonly requested. In fact, almost everyone of you have heard this general level of suggestions made as reasons for calling a group session.

A word of caution! Do not go from here directly into the planning phase. As yet, there is no proof a group session is needed. The examples, as stated are really goals that can provide a general direction of need. They do not tell us much about the specific content desired.

Each goal now has to be broken into more manageable, behavioral statements. If the process begins to look like a management by objectives, you are right on track.

To illustrate the process, we have taken one of the goal statements and analyzed what it means to the person making a group session request. This is how it looks.

GOAL:

Improve client welfare.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Improve quality of food.
2. Increase recreation alternatives.
3. Increase assistance payments.

.

.

.

7. Improve evaluation procedures.
8. Increase job training skills.
9. Develop client advocates.

(The above statements are not actually true objectives because criteria are not included.)

By way of summary, general statements of intent are requested for putting on a group meeting. This has been analyzed and restated into several behavioral statements which help direct needed effort. It is now possible to determine if one or two objectives warrant a group meeting.

Moving on with the example provided "Improved client welfare" has been broken down into nine manageable statements. Operationally we have now defined what it meant by "improving client welfare", at least as it related to our needs.

One can agree that most of the objective statements are important. But, we want to have the best possible group session, and too many tasks for a single meeting lead easily to nonproductivity. Therefore, select one or two priority problems. For the sake of our discussion, only one objective has been selected, "increase recreational alternatives."

The next step is to examine whether group session outcomes will have any impact or if there is a better way to accomplish the same effect.

Will the group's outcomes carry any impact into action?

Group participants may work hard to do their best and really have considerable commitment to the results, but, unless there is administrative approval to activate results, you can consider the group session less than successful.

For the example, it is wise to get some commitment from your superiors to determine how far the group can go in deciding how to "increase recreation alternatives." If additional money and staff are not possible but anything else is possible, then the group does have some power to make changes. Be sure if you decide to have a group meeting, that money and staff restrictions are clearly identified when the ground rules (in the session phase) are stated.

Can the problem be solved by other, more inexpensive means?

Even though most of us are on regular salaries, there must be some considerations for cost of several professionals sitting together. Their workload is already determined and will be waiting for them when they get back. A group session can be usually considered as added workload, i.e., an expense.

Other expenses included are travel and perdiem for out-of-town participants, duplicating materials, outside consultants, room expense, and other extras.

In our example, you may want to first consider alternative techniques such as a survey. This procedure allows you to not only ask recreation staff but other professionals, parents, clients, administrators, specials in other states. A group session would have input from a selected few where by using this method, you can receive input from many more minds.

A second alternative is to send out directives to recreational staff telling them to add two new activities into their existing program.

A third alternative is asking each recreational staff to provide a report describing their total program and share these by mail with other recreational staffs as suggestions for increasing recreational alternatives.

Lets examine how these questions fit into the different types of group meetings.

Training workshop. The purpose of a training workshop is to inform others of something important. Different training procedures include lectures, seminars, symposiums, conferences, audio-visuals, on-the-job practice, or a combination of several.

Straight information is the most time efficient process but often has little carryover unless participants are allowed to interact somewhat with the leader. One should select this procedure if it is important to provide a single kind of information to a large group of participants. When this method is used for a small group it takes more time to present the same material because discussion becomes almost automatic.

On-the-job training is the other end of the continuum and takes considerable time to impart knowledge to a very small group. Training is usually one-to-one and becomes very individualized.

Should we use a training workshop to teach recreational staff new program alternatives as stated in our example? Chances are the recreational staffs already know several alternatives. Their problem is adding them to existing programs. Therefore, we can conclude a training workshop does not fit our needs.

Workmeeting. The purpose of a workmeeting is to use the expertise from the participants which is facilitated by the leader to solve a problem.

It appears that this method does fit our problem of the example.

Task force. The purpose of a task force is to study the scope of a problem and define problem areas. It may also outline strategies but does not actually put them into action.

If you are unsure our example is not well defined, a small task force may be necessary to assure all administrative and other barriers are clearly understood. For our purposes, we have assumed this, as part of the preplanning stage, has already been accomplished.

Conclusions of Preplanning Phase

Goal: Improve client welfare.

Priority objective: Increase recreational alternatives.

Do we need a group session?: Yes.

Type of group session: A workshop.

Lets move to the planning phase...

The Planning Phase

Several questions need to be examined:

1. How extensive is our objective?
2. Who should be involved?
3. How shall the agenda proceed?
4. What will it cost?

How Extensive is Our Objective?

The most successful group sessions are ones where the purpose is clearly defined and all topics on the agenda relate specifically to the objective.

Keep the number of objectives to one or two. Within these objectives may be several subareas. Having too many of either objectives or subareas tend to frustrate the group and decrease their problem-solving capability, or in the case of training workshops, decrease learning.

In our example "increasing recreational alternatives" we seemingly have chosen a concise problem to solve. Lets break it out further into some subareas. If this can be done, there is a greater chance the group session will not diverge into undesired areas.

Subareas:

1. Adding more hours of recreation time.
2. Giving more choices to clients during a single time period.
3. Adding more recreational sites such as a gym, bowling alley, or movie theater.
4. Pinpointing a specific population who consistently are being shortchanged.
5. Help other staff in providing recreational time.
6. Any of the above and more.
7. All of the above and more.

We will use this expanded information to answer the other planning questions.

Who Should be Involved?

The purpose of involving people in a group session is because they are necessary to complete the mission. So how does one decide who to involve?

There are three types of people who can be involved:

1. Individuals with specific expertise
2. Individuals with influence
3. Individuals on the way up

Individuals with specific expertise. Obviously, a group is called together to get something done. By examining the objective and subareas, expertise areas are identified. It is unwise to convene a group to discuss problems of the emotionally disturbed without including some participants with experience and specialized knowledge. And, if the emotionally disturbed problem includes other dimensions such as criminal offenders, some group participants should be included for this part of the problem as well.

Individuals with influence. Some participants should be included for political reasons. One may want to include active members of the community, parents, public officials, adjacent agency administrators, etc., who can cut through the mires of red tape and communication barriers. Having such people involved during the working stages helps to commit them to desired outcomes.

Individuals on the way up. Most of us who regularly attend meetings find ourselves sitting with almost the same group of people. Meeting sessions are good times to bring in others who may, in the future, be able to attend similar meetings. Strange as it seems, they quickly adjust and can be of great help in the future.

So how does one proceed in determining group participants? This can be illustrated by returning to our example.

We start with a page and make three columns headed by the three categories of participants, individuals with expertise, individuals with influence, and individuals on the way up. Now begin listing names if you know of certain individuals, agencies if you do not know who to specifically invite, and special interest areas (for agencies and interest areas, names can be added in the detail phase).

Do not set a limited number until you decide how many participants are desired.

experts	influential	newcomers
Joe Garcia, Rec. Dir. Dir. Serv. Agency A	Fred Fine, Reg. Consult. H.E.W.	Rec. staff Ass'ts. Dir. Serv. Agency A
Sue Barnes, Rec. Dir. Dir. Serv. Agency B	Civitan Club	Rec. staff Ass'ts. Dir. Serv. Agency B
Tom Jones, Prog. Dir. Dir. Serv. Agency C	Rotary Club	Rec. staff Ass'ts. Dir. Serv. Agency C
John Duski, Consult. State Agency	City Commissioner	
Asst. Rec. Director Div. Serv. Agency A	Grace Arnold Parent group	
Parks & Recreation	local theater owners	
	bowling proprietors	
	Exec. Directors or Ass'ts. of Div. Serv. Agencies A, B, C	
	other staff in Direct Serv. Agencies A, B, C who are responsible for client programming (added during method analysis of # 1, How shall the Agenda Proceed section)	

The above partial listing now gives us an idea who can be involved and still provide a problem oriented group session. Keep this listing handy for awhile until you decide how the agency shall proceed and some cost estimate is determined.

It may seem out of order to make a list now when participants are determinded later. The reasoning is simple. With your list now partically completed, new names can be added as they will come to you while developing an agenda.

By developing a participant list, budget costs will force you to be overly selective. And, without fail, someone will be left out whom you really wanted.

How Shall the Agenda Proceed?

Content of an agenda is already established when you examine extensiveness of your objectives. They only need to be rewritten as outcomes with a suggested method. Following that is to put it all into a timeframe and your agenda is done.

It has been the experience of this author that most group sessions either have an agenda so loosely constructed that participants spend most of their time seeking a logical direction, or so lengthy that profound decisions are usually nonexistent. The reason this seems to happen is because planners of group sessions do not thoroughly think through the method process.

Lets follow the agenda development procedure by returning to our example.

We wrote five statements when examinining our objective of increasing recreational alternatives. These are now written down for you and followed by a suggested outcome and method.

1. Adding more hours of recreation time.

   Outcome: Clients shall be provided one hour more recreation time each weekday and two hours more each weekend day.

   Method: There needs to be some interdepartmental discussion to add this time without adding additional manpower. This can be accomplished by having some short reports by agencies who have had some success in cooperative planning (large group session) and some small discussion groups to dig out methods for each particular agency (subgroup session). Allow feedback time and opportunity for minority reports (large group session).

2. Giving more choices to clients during a single time period.

Outcome: Clients shall be given an average of one additional alternative each day.

Method: Plans can be developed by the recreational directors and their staffs (special subgroup meeting). This can be done prior to your worksession and may not even need to be included on the agenda. Their reports of success can be published and disseminated to the other direct service agencies without coming together (a nongroup session process).

3. Adding more recreational sites such as a gym, bowling alley, or movie theater.

Outcome: Facilities, outside the direct service agency shall be developed as additional recreational alternatives.

Method: Much of this can be accomplished by small meetings between the outside facility and the direct service agency (a non-group session process). But, by having them included in the worksession can be politically important and add to your odds for success (large group or subgroup process). Your clients may have some social problems which can influence outside involvement and such facility managers can be made to feel good about extending extra privileges if they can sense how they are part of a grand plan. Small group sessions with feedback opportunities should bring success. Have the groups mixed across regions so that similar outside facility administrators can converse together.

4. Pinpointing a specific population who consistently are being shortchanged.

Outcome: Your pinpointed population shall have two hours of specially designed recreation each day.

Method: Chances are the leftout population is similar in nature across your direct service agencies. There needs to be some honest brainstorming and this is really a task force problem (small group process). You may choose to have a separate group session organized to seek possible alternative or have a special subgroup meet during your worksession to act independently and examine the scope of the problem. Their feedback should be in the form of recommendations for a future worksession (not a worksession process).

5. Help other staff in providing recreational time.

Outcome: Client care staff in direct service agency shall become skilled in providing recreational activities.

Method: This outcome has two possibilities. One, do you wish to discuss how to do this (a worksession process)? Or, two, do you think special training is necessary (a training process process)? The first choice can be included in your agenda; the second does not belong here but is a training workshop problem. Solutions can be determined in subgroups (subgroup process) with floor discussion following (large group process).

6. & 7. Any or all of the above and more.

Outcome: Participants address issues of their concern relating to increasing client recreational activities.

Method: This can be accomplished in two ways depending on what you desire to be accomplished. An open forum allows for free discussion and interchange between participants. On the negative side, the method limits the number of new ideas.

Brainstorming is another method. Many ideas can be presented but interchange between participants is limited. The open forum develops closure which is consistent with the workmeeting concept while brainstorming is more of a task force concept. Either is effective for your purposes and should be held toward the closure of the group session if your regular agenda is short. If your plans are to meet for two or three days, participants will be too fatigued to offer quality input.

We have now examined some desired outcomes and methods which can be used to reach them. Suggestions presented are not the only alternative, but are most commonly used for workmeetings.

We have also discovered something else. There is one heck of a lot of work! Maybe some areas should be cut.

In fact, you may notice some of the decisionmaking of paring down the agenda is already accomplished. Items two and six can be accomplished by other methods. This leaves four topics making the agenda more easily managed.

Following are two suggested agendas to meet the needs of our worksession.

Tentative one-day plan.

Begin at nine a.m. sharp!

Set the mission of the workmeeting.

Lay out any ground rules necessary for accomplishing mission and helping group to stay on target.

Pass out group assignments.

This must be planned in advance and ready to go. If you choose to have a facilitator, be sure they have a suggested subagenda sheet and have been advised of how to proceed.

Subgroups meet for entire morning using brainstorming methods for at least 30 minutes. Then have groups discuss each idea presented (facilitator may group some ideas together to assure all ideas are discussed fully).

Break for lunch! Give at least 1½ hours, especially if group has to go out to eat.

Subgroups meet at 1:30 p.m. to begin writing suggestions in a formal manner. Allow 1½ hours for this task.

Total group reconvenes for feedback. Each subgroup is allowed ten to fifteen minutes for presentation with ten to fifteen minutes for floor discussion. Session breaks up at 5:00 p.m. extremely tired and very much aware of alternative ideas.

This one day meeting agenda requires enough participants to man four subgroups. If recreational staffs from the direct service agencies are not large enough each to send four responsible people, it may be advisable to have three or four separate one-day worksessions.

Tentative two-day plan.

Begin at 9:00 a.m. sharp!

Set mission of workmeeting.

Lay out any ground rules necessary for accomplishing mission and helping group to stay on target.

Pass out subgroup assignments.

Presentation of each outcome need.

Have a spokesperson be prepared to talk about each of the outcome needs. Make presentations limited to a needs identification and not to offer any solutions.

Have questions from the floor to clarify each outcome need following each short presentation.

Subgroups begin meeting at 11:00 a.m.

Mission for the morning session is to brainstorm ideas.

Lunch break!

All meet back as a large group to hear brainstorming ideas and have floor discussion to add other ideas.

Subgroups meet to develop solutions to their assigned problem area.

Break about 4:30 p.m. and relax to a social and dinner.

All meet together at 8:30 a.m.

Each subgroup makes a presentation and identifies some unsolved problem areas. Total group discuss positive and negatives of report and offer their own suggestions.

Break for lunch!

Subgroups meet to write final report for future dissemination.

Session ends about 4:00 p.m.

The two-day meeting has the advantage over a one-day meeting by providing additional feedback between subgroups and the main group. Using this method, while more expensive, does offer everyone a chance to speak their minds on all subjects, assuring a greater chance for implementation.of ideas. Number of participants should be not less than twenty-four to assure proper balance in each subgroup.

What Will It Cost?

Now for the crucial and deciding issue which determines how much you can accomplish and how many people can be involved. Choices for financing can come from your agency or from the participant agencies. Those people who have been suggested as political participants should have their per diems paid by your agency.

A one-day session is not that much less expensive than a two-day session. Travel is the same. Most salaries of participants are already budgeted. Additional expenses can include rooms for out-of-town participants, additional meals, and two extra coffee breaks.

Whether you plan a one-day session, a two-day session, or a several day session, do not make it look too cheap. Remember you are asking for help and you should make participants feel important.

Summary of Planning Phase

Lets assume we have just examined four questions in the planning phase. Costs have now been estimated for twenty-four participants and determined whom you wish to invite. Your agenda has been pared down into manageable outcomes and, you have adequate money for a one-day session.

It is now time to begin the detail phase.

The Detail Phase

Following is a checklist of items that must be handled prior to your meeting. The order may vary and several activities can be managed at the same time. It is a good idea to make a similar list, attach people responsible and deadlines for completion to insure everything runs smoothly at the session.

Activity	Deadline	Person
__Set a date		
__Determine location		
__Develop an exact budget (food, rooms, travel, materials, etc.)		
__Invite participants (preregistration, alternates)		
__Prepare materials (send preliminary materials, print enough handouts and agenda prepare any packets, etc.)		
__Finalize facility arrangements (room assignments, menues, coffee breaks, time schedules)		
__Arrange for audio-visual equipment		
__Select program leader (s)		
__Set up subgroups (facilitators, recorders, etc.)		
__Have a person identified for emergencies		
__ Other_____		
__ _____		
__ _____		

Now relax and wait!

Selecting a Session Leader

The session leader has one very important role, and that is to keep everything on schedule. Your planning has taken into account how the meeting should flow. The session leader must see that the schedule is maintained. A secondary role of the leader is to be available for any unforseen problem such as interpersonal conflicts, changes of last minute participants, and awareness of sensitive areas in the problems discussed.

You may be planning the workmeeting, but that does not automatically entitle you to be the leader of the session. If you are fortunate to know a person who can fill this role leaving the unforeseen problems to be solved by you, it is the better for everyone.

There are several qualities to look for in a leader:

- knowledge of group process and group interaction
- knowledge about your worksession area
- ability to get less vocal participants to offer their suggestions
- ability to keep group and subgroups on schedule without having participants feel overly manipulated
- established authority with the participants

It is difficult to be more explicit about the detail phase. A group of twenty-four participants naturally is less complex than considering a group session for six hundred. Similarly, a session with local participants is easier than when most everyone has to travel. However, while details vary in complexity, each requires careful scrutiny.

One major concern is completion deadlines. For example, it is important to set a date and location early enough so that invited participants can plan their personal agendas. Be sure you have enough time to do everything early; there will be enough emergencies later on to take up your waiting time.

The Session Phase

If everything is well planned, your meeting will be a success. Just let it happen and appreciate participants and leaders as having expertise and a desire to want something accomplished.

Group Process Information

If you are not experienced in planning meetings or do not have an experienced leader, this discussion on group process is very helpful.

There are many books and articles written on group process. If you have not read them, I suggest you do. Probably one of the finest ones is Small Group Communication, Cathcart and Samovar. Knowing about group process helps to design an agenda that accomplishes what you intend.

The following material is drawn from the writer's personal experience and is found to be consistent in almost every group setting.

Chart of Group Interaction Levels

Group comes together in an apparently friendly manner.
Friends who know each other sit together.
People with similar feelings sit together.

Interaction Level One

At first opportunity, certain verbal individuals will do their own flag waving and telling of their success (can be a little exaggerated).

- Everyone gets into a show and tell session. Some participants will hold back for a time and lay out their grand plan a little later.
- Listening is selective and not open or free.

Special interest groups will try to maintain a degree of autonomy and care not to give in to the real needs as presented.

Several participants attempts to keep problem at an abstract level that is too great to solve and will use budget restrictions as a copout for change or compromise.

Participants spend too much time on definitions.

Interaction Level Two

Problems presented are not very useful.

- Some are too massive with little focus.
- Some presented are almost too mundane or with little relevance.

Discussions are usually negatively oriented. Responses start with:

- I agree, but...
- Yes, but you don't seem to understand our particular problem which is...
- We are a little different in that...
- Ok, but we don't have manpower to...
- Why should we do that since...

Interaction Level Three

Minor agreements on nonthreatening items and issues are possible. Honesty and openess begins but not lively criticism of eath other's ideas. Conversation is politically slanted. Some minor compromises are possible. Individual participants look at others as the bad guys and not at themselves.

Interaction Level Four

Everyone is finding they are closer to each other's views than they are apart or different.

A small percentage of participants who are willing to make changes become frustrated because of the amount of session time spent without meaningful results.

Interaction Level Five

Real problem solving begins.

Honest discussion begins to take place with positive and negative issues brought out openly. (This will usually happen only with peers at the same level or from advocate people who have little or no turf to protect)

Identification of future and current problems is realistic and to the point. (This may not happen if leader lets the meeting get away.)

Group gets into some heavy digging and position level stratification is less important.

Group cannot get into timelines for getting a need solved as yet.

Interaction Level Six

Some important decisions are made.

Leader and group feels pressure for closure of agenda items.

Opposing views dwindle and total agreement is common.

Suggestions are agreed to with little negotiations from minority opinion groups.

Interaction Level Seven

THERE IS NO INTERACTION

Group is washed out and tired.

Suggestions from the group are shallow and meaningless.

Only issue that can be presented effectively is when to schedule the next meeting.

Putting Levels of Group Interaction to an Agenda

Hopefully you have not yet reached the seventh level of interaction and have turned off this paper. We are almost there; just one more example.

For purposes of this discussion, a two-day agenda is used because it is easier to demonstrate group interaction levels and a well-planned agenda. The problem is the same, increasing recreational alternatives with the same agenda suggested earlier.

First day

	Planned Agenda	Interaction Level
8:30- 9:00	Coffee and get acquainted	Level One
9:00- 9:30	Introductions, ground rules, set subgroup assignments	
9:30-10:00	Presentations of specific outcomes and clarification questions from the floor. No solutions are developed	
10:00-10:20	Coffeebreak	
10:20-11:00	Two presentations of specific outcomes and clarification questions from the floor. No solutions are developed	
11:00-12:00	Small subgroups meet to brainstorm ideas about their assigned problems	
12:00- 1:30	Lunch. This break seems to prepare the group for movement into the next interaction level	
1:30- 2:30	Entire group meets to hear brainstorming ideas and hear additional suggestions from the floor	Level Two
2:30- 2:50	Coffee or cold drink break	

2:50- 4:30	Subgroups meet to develop solutions in assigned problem area	Level Three
4:30	Meeting adjourns, time for socializing and dinner	Level Four

Second day

8:30- 9:45	Two subgroups make presentations and ask for discussion from floor	Level Five
9:45-10:00	Coffeebreak	
10:00-11:30	Two subgroups make presentations and ask for discussion from floor	
12:00- 1:30	Lunch	Level Six
1:30- about 4:00	Subgroups meet individually to develop formal report for future dissemination	
about 4:00	Adjourn	Level Seven

Any attempts to alter the interaction process by trying to develop important decisions too early will succeed to some extent but will not be worth the effort. If you feel it is necessary to accelerate decisions, you do not need a workmeeting at all but some administrative directives.

Believe It Or Not

It is the suggestion of this author that you not take what you have just read on blind faith. Or, conversely, do not simply put this paper away questioning its validity.

The challenge is to sit back in your next group session and observe if these principles of group interaction are reasonably accurate.

In Summary

This paper has tried to briefly describe the processes which go into staging a successful group session. While all of it may seem overly complicated, the well-planned effort can be very worthwhile.

Timeframes for each phase in staging a group session vary. Preplanning can take place in a few minutes or several days. The same is true for the planning stages. The detail phase is all the time between the planning and session phases (up to two weeks for small meetings and several months for larger meetings). And, of course, the session phase is as long as you planned it to be.

Please excuse me now. I just received a memo asking me to plan a symposium for Fall. So off to the preplanning phase once again....